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The right to vote by correspondence

How to set about it

From July 1 of this year, you will be able to vote in federal elections and referendums and to append your signature to popular initiatives from your domicile abroad. What does this mean in practical terms for you?

The articles on this subject in Nos. 4/90 and 3/91 of the Swiss Review contained information on the actual content of the revised electoral law, but we would now like to go into detail about what exactly you must do if you live abroad, are at least 18 years old and wish to take part in federal elections or referendums.

Registration

If you intend to vote by correspondence from your domicile abroad as of July 1, 1992, you must first register with your responsible Swiss diplomatic representation (embassy, consulate-general or consulate). This may be done either in writing or by calling in person.

Those who are registered under the old law on participation in elections and referendums which remains in force until July 1, 1992, are not required to repeat their registration during the first four years of application of the new law, i.e. not before 1996.

Your diplomatic representation will provide you with the relevant information leaflets and registration forms. The forms in question must be filled out clearly and legibly with your full name and address, together with the name of the municipality in Switzerland in which you wish to vote.

As voting municipality you may choose either a municipality in which you

previously lived or your official municipality of origin.

Once the choice has been made, you cannot change the municipality in which you wish to vote as long as you are registered at the same diplomatic representation.

Participation in elections and referendums

- All necessary voting papers, together with the official observations of the Federal Council will be sent to your postal address **abroad** by the authorities of the municipality in which you have chosen to vote.

You should report any change of address as promptly as possible to your embassy or consulate.

Your voting paper – duly completed – must be inserted into the envelope provided for the purpose. This must be closed and put, together with your cantonal voting card, into the envelope provided for posting. **You must stamp**

Make sure you are fully informed

In some states participation in the political life of another state is an offence and/or may, in the case of dual nationality, lead to loss of your non-Swiss nationality. Any information you may require on this subject may be obtained from your embassy or consulate.

this envelope yourself and send it by post to the authority of the municipality in which you have chosen to vote.

You should take note that the Swiss authorities obviously cannot guarantee the efficiency of foreign postal administrations. In consequence, you alone are responsible for the failure to arrive or late arrival of your voting papers.

- It goes without saying that you can still vote either in person or by correspondence if you happen to be **in Switzerland** at the time of the election or referendum. In this case you must pick up your voting papers from the voting registration office of your municipality during normal business hours.

If you wish to vote in person, you must report your temporary residence in Switzerland to the voting registration office of your municipality at least six weeks before the election or referendum in question.

Naturalisation of foreign spouses

According to the revised Nationality Law which came into force on January 1, 1992, in certain circumstances naturalisation of the foreign spouses of Swiss citizens domiciled abroad may be obtained through the simplified procedure. However, since the number of applications remains very high, the naturalisation process may take as long as two years. In consequence, it is requested that no correspondence on the subject should be addressed to Swiss authorities either at home or abroad during the unavoidable waiting period.



(Photo: Keystone)

Signature of popular initiatives and referendums

As a Swiss citizen domiciled abroad, you will also be able to sign popular initiatives and demands for referendums at the federal level from July 1, 1992. You may obtain the necessary papers from the initiative or referendum committee in question. If, however, you wish to sign during a temporary stay in Switzerland, you may append your name to the list of signatures in your voting municipality. The Swiss Review will publish regular and up-to-date lists of all initiative and referendum committees (see p. 13).

GUA



The Solidarity Fund

Livelihood not entirely safe anywhere in the world

The latest cases to be dealt with by the Fund (Solidarity Fund for the Swiss Abroad) show very clearly that the livelihood of Swiss Abroad is not entirely safe anywhere in the world. The self-help concept which started in 1958 proved itself more than ever in 1991.



«The self-help concept which started out in 1958 and was intended to provide compensation for loss of livelihood has not only proved itself on many occasions but has also shown itself very well adapted for future use». In broad terms this is the balance-sheet provided by the many cases of loss of livelihood which Swiss Abroad reported to the Fund during the last year, according to its president, Hans J. Halbheer.

The Swiss Abroad – wherever they live in the world – are permanently running the risk of abrupt loss of livelihood. The Fund is able to provide lump-sum compensation in such cases of up to Sfr. 100,000 per person and per case for building up a new livelihood in another part of the world. This is due to the deposits by the Fund's members which – with the exception of a modest risk premium – remain in the personal possession of the

member in question and earn interest at current levels.

Learning from experience

Twice Sfr. 50,000 for a Swiss married couple in Liberia; Sfr. 20,000 for Swiss citizens returning to their homeland from Iraq; Sfr. 20,000 and Sfr. 15,000 from the Fund for Swiss citizens in Kenya and Zaire; Sfr. 30,000 for the first case of loss of livelihood on the continent of Europe in response to a request for compensation from Swiss citizens returning from Yugoslavia. These compensation cases from the Fund's records in the last few years show with remarkable elo-

and have decided to build bridges with their old homeland by means of savings deposits in order to insure themselves in the event of loss of livelihood.

More useful than ever

Fund President Halbheer adds: «When you come back to your old homeland at a time of favourable economic conditions and at a suitable age, setting yourself back on your feet is by no means impossible. But it is not so easy at a time when jobs are hard to find». People who are suddenly forced to return to Switzerland are certainly very relieved indeed when they find that they can benefit from the start-up help. Head office is always prepared to step in rapidly and without unnecessary formalities in cases of loss of livelihood stemming from war, expropriation, violent troubles, expulsion or any other type of political pressure which may be exercised on citizens living abroad. Anyone who thinks in terms of the risks they might incur will surely reach the conclusion that even a high-yield capital investment cannot provide the type of security which comes from insurance of one's actual means of liveli-

The civil war in Yugoslavia has forced many Swiss Abroad to return to their old homeland.
(Photo: Keystone)

quence that 1991 saw Swiss Abroad experiencing loss of livelihood more often than in any year since 1984.

A glance at the present world situation brings ample evidence of this: nationalist conflicts leading to armed clashes in the republics of the

Correction

In the article on the revised Nationality Law which appeared in the Official Communications of Swiss Review No. 4/91 it was incorrectly stated that women who had lost their Swiss citizenship as a result of marriage to a foreigner at any time before January 1, 1992, could recover it during the ensuing ten years. However, the revised Nationality Law in fact states that an application for restoration of citizenship may be made only within less than 10 years of the loss of such citizenship.

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former Soviet Union, civil war in what was once Yugoslavia, bloody street-fighting in Algeria, Liberia and Zaire, and finally the Gulf war. About 10,000 members of the Fund throughout the world have shown themselves aware of these risks

hood. 1991, the 34th year of its existence, has shown that the Fund is today as indispensable as it ever has been in the past.

For more detailed information, please write to: The Fund, Gutenbergstrasse 6, CH-3011 Berne. ■